

# RESEARCH ON THE PARANÁ SPEAKS ENGLISH PROGRAM: A BIBLIOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

PESQUISA SOBRE O PROGRAMA O PARANÁ FALA INGLÊS: UMA ANÁLISE BIBLIOGRÁFICA

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**Abstract:** Unquestionably, discussions on the internationalization of higher education have gained currency in the educational context (KNIGHT, 2004; ALTBACH; KNIGHT, 2007; DELGADO-MÁRQUEZ; HURTADO-TORRES; BONDAR, 2011), and language policies prove to be a crucial issue in the internationalization arena. In this regard, Paraná's government created the Paraná Speaks Languages (English) Program in order to meet the demands of such internationalization. With this background in mind, this study aimed to provide a bibliographic analysis of the research on the aforementioned institutional program. Moreover, the study seeks to answer the following research inquiry: What is the focus of the body of literature on the Paraná Speaks English Program? Following the academic procedures of the bibliographic research, only three studies (MARSON, BORGES, 2015; EL KADRI, DI RAIMO, 2017; MARSON, 2017) were found and analyzed under a qualitative perspective. Results show that the literature in this topic is significant scarce. Besides, the studies scrutinized are centered on virtual and real gains promoted by the program. Such gains concern the improvement in language proficiency, which in turn strengthens academic mobility and the internationalization of higher education.

**Keywords:** Paraná speaks English. Bibliographic analysis. Internationalization.

**Resumo:** Inquestionavelmente, discussões sobre a internacionalização do ensino superior têm ganhado força no contexto educacional (KNIGHT, 2004; ALTBACH; KNIGHT, 2007; DELGADO-MÁRQUEZ; HURTADO-TORRES; BONDAR, 2011), e as políticas linguísticas se mostram uma questão crucial na arena da internacionalização. Nesse sentido, o governo paranaense criou o Programa o Paraná Fala Idiomas (inglês) para atender às demandas de tal internacionalização. Com esse contexto em mente, este estudo teve como objetivo fornecer uma análise bibliográfica de pesquisas sobre o referido programa institucional. Além disso, o estudo busca responder à seguinte pergunta de pesquisa: Qual o foco da literatura sobre o programa o Paraná Fala Inglês? Seguindo os procedimentos acadêmicos da pesquisa bibliográfica, apenas três estudos (MARSON, BORGES, 2015; EL KADRI, DI RAIMO, 2017; MARSON, 2017) foram encontrados e analisados sob uma perspectiva qualitativa. Os resultados mostram que a literatura nesse tópico é significativamente escassa. Além disso, os estudos analisados estão centrados em ganhos virtuais e reais promovidos pelo programa. Tais ganhos dizem respeito à melhoria da proficiência linguística, o que, por sua vez, fortalece a mobilidade acadêmica e a internacionalização do ensino superior.

**Palavras-chave:** Paraná fala inglês. Análise bibliográfica. Internacionalização.

## Introduction

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The past few decades have witnessed an extraordinary movement towards the internationalization of higher education (HE henceforth). As Knight (2004, 2008) contents, the internationalization of higher education can be construed as an umbrella term, given that it is frequently associated with multifarious spheres, such as: academic mobility, partnerships, joint research and curriculum making and so forth. Moreover, Altbach and Knight (2007) state that the internationalization process is strengthened providing that policies (of different natures) are implemented.

In order to cope with such demands, Paraná's state government created the Paraná Speaks Languages Program (PFI, acronym in Portuguese for *Paraná Fala Idiomas*) in 2013. The first edition of the program began in the second semester of 2014 and lasted 22 months. According to Marson (2017), such edition was based on a monolingual perspective, that is, it focused only on the English language (Paraná Speaks English). Moreover, the first edition centered its offer on preparatory courses for international entrance exams (e.g.; TOEFL-*Test of English as a Foreign Language*). The second edition started in the second semester of 2017 and it is expected to be finalized by 2019. The current edition has been broader both in terms of the nature of the courses offered and the number of languages covered. In this respect, the program has offered English courses at different language levels, from pre-intermediate to post-intermediate. Additionally, pre-intermediate French courses are proposed. Nonetheless, taking into consideration the scope of this study, the focus here is on the English language.

Inasmuch as English plays a crucial role in the internationalization process, as argued by Marson (2017), the institutional program aimed ultimately at improving the quality of undergraduate and graduate education in Paraná as well as promoting the internalization of the seven state universities: UEL (State University of Londrina), UEM (State University of Maringá), UENP (State University of Northern Paraná), UEPG (State University of Ponta Grossa), UNESPAR (State University of Paraná), UNICENTRO (State University of Midwestern Paraná) and UNIOESTE (State University of Western Paraná).

Bearing this in mind, this paper endeavored to provide a bibliographical analysis of the research on the Paraná Speaks English Program. Furthermore, it aims to answer the following research inquiry: What is the focus of the body of literature on the Paraná Speaks English Program?

The justification of this study lies in the fact that PFI is an incipient institutional program and therefore requires further investigation. Inasmuch as the program is considerably recent, the literature is substantially scarce, which in turn strengthens the rationale. Lastly, this paper can

potentially give rise to future research on the aforementioned program, so that the impacts of the program can be evaluated.

This paper is structured as follows: an introduction which provides an outlook on the Paraná Speaks English program and the rationale for the study, a theoretical section that covers a discussion on language policies and research on the program, a methodology section, the bibliographical analysis and some conclusive notes.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This literature review section addresses questions with respect to language policies as well as the literature on the Paraná Speaks English Program.

### **Language policies**

Nowadays, the internationalization of higher education has been an overly-debated topic in the educational scenario. Highly influenced by the so-called globalization phenomenon (DELGADO-MÁRQUEZ; HURTADO-TORRES and BONDAR, 2011), this internationalization is intertwined with academic, professional and economical issues. In this regard, Mendes (2012) asserts that globalization encompasses cooperation between higher education institutions, and such cooperation serves various purposes, principally academic and economical ones. Additionally, West (2016) argues that partnerships between institutions promote an economical development not only at an institutional level but at a federal one as well.

In the internationalization of universities arena, language policies prove to be an agenda of paramount importance, since they direct the use of a certain language to numerous social (academic, economical, political) functions (SENEFONTE, 2018). Furthermore, Calvet (2002) postulates that there is a power dimension related to language policies, that is, when a language is chosen to exert important operations in a social community, such choice is always driven by political and economical forces. Therefore, as underscored by Altbach and Knight (2007), globalization can empower some languages and overlook others.

Language issues are inevitably interwoven with internationalization, as the latter alludes to numerous activities, such as academic mobility, partnerships between institutions (joint curriculum, research, seminars), benchmarking, to name a few (KNIGHT, 2004). Needless to say, languages (especially English) play an important role in such activities.

Taking this discussion into consideration, Brazil's federal government, in order to cope

with the fast-paced internationalization of higher education, strengthened the implementation of language policies to address internationalization issues, one notable example is the Languages Without Borders Program (English). Established in 2012, the program is mostly aligned with academic mobility (preparatory courses for entrance exams, joint research etc.) (BRASIL, 2012). Furthermore, it is relevant to stress that such governmental initiative could enable the insertion of more Brazilian research in the international context.

For similar purposes, Paraná's government implemented the Paraná Speaks Languages Program in 2014. Its first edition began in the second semester of 2014 and finished in the first semester of 2016, whilst the second initiated in the second semester of 2017 and is expected to finish by the first semester of 2019. Both editions were offered at the seven state universities of Paraná: UEL, UEM UENP, UEPG, UNESPAR, UNICENTRO and UNIOESTE.

Conversely, however, the nature of the courses offered differs significantly from one edition to the other. The first focuses on preparatory courses for TOEFL, whereas the second is centered on language proficiency for multifarious purposes (principally academic mobility) and not only for international entrance exams.

By and large, such language policies promote the improvement of higher education (in terms of research, teacher education and others) and also maximizes the process of internationalization. Nonetheless, it worth pointing that language policies/internationalization prove to be a complex issue. As advocated by Hornberger (2006), language policies need to project several variables involved in this process, such as costs, infrastructure, human issues, political relations and others. Moreover, we may assume that this topic is considerably incipient in the Brazilian context, which means that further research, discussion and progress are needed.

### **Research on the Paraná speaks English program**

A literature search was conducted during January-March of 2019, as follows: a) search terms employed: "Paraná Speaks English" and "*Paraná Fala Inglês*"; b) No delimitation of time frame; c) Databases utilized: ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), CAPES (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education in Brazil) and Google Scholar. Hence, the literature search encompasses research studies carried out nationally and internationally, even though only investigations conducted in Brazil were found. As a matter of fact, only three studies were obtained: Marson; Borges (2015), El Kadri; Di Raimo (2017) and Marson (2017). These studies are illustrated in Table 1:

**Table 1:** Research on The Paraná Speaks English Program

Study	Methodology	Context
El Kadri and Di Raimo (2017) ( <i>book chapter</i> )	Documentary study (data gathered from a website)	Paraná
Marson and Borges (2015) ( <i>paper</i> )	Documentary Study (quantitative data from PFI at UEPG)	UEPG
Marson (2017) ( <i>master's dissertation</i> )	Qualitative investigation (by means of questionnaires), involving 77 participants	UEL

**Source:** The author

El Kadri and Di Raimo (2017) attempted to investigate the language policy that underlies the Paraná Speaks English Program. To achieve such aim, the authors collected data from the official website of the program. The documentary analysis unveils a monolingual ideology germane to the language policy scrutinized. Furthermore, the authors conclude that such policy is centered on English, which is construed as a commodity for the internationalization of higher education.

Marson and Borges (2015) present partial results of the Paraná Speaks English Program at the State University of Ponta Grossa (UEPG). From a quantitative perspective, the authors ratify the relevance of the program at UEPG, since it promoted improvement in language proficiency and teacher education.

Seeking to investigate participants' perceptions of the Paraná Speaks English Program and the importance of such program to the internationalization of the State University of Londrina (UEL), Marson (2017) carried out a qualitative study, by means of questionnaires, encompassing 72 students, 4 language instructors and 1 coordinator. Results indicate that despite some drawbacks (as of the focus of the courses and methods employed), the participants understand that the program brought substantial contributions to the university, such as: improvement in language proficiency, which in turn enabled more academic mobility (out) and consequently maximized the internationalization of UEL.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that the three studies will be further examined in the analytical section of this paper.

### Methodological Considerations

As this research examines (comparing and contrasting) other studies, it can be classified as a bibliographic study. According to Pizzani *et al.* (2012), the bibliographic research seeks to, inter alia, “enable knowledge construction about a certain area of knowledge, facilitate the identification and selection of methods and techniques to be employed by the researcher (...)”

(PIZZANI, 2012, p. 54).

In addition, Reis (2013) contends that a research study may have numerous types of justification, one of them is necessity of developing (theoretical) knowledge about a given topic, especially when such topic is scarcely explored, as is the case of the Paraná Speaks English Program.

As adduced earlier, the data were obtained from a literature search conducted in the beginning of 2019. National and international databases were utilized and only three studies were found, viz.: Marson; Borges (2015), El Kadri; Di Raimo (2017) and Marson (2017). Each research was summarized in the literature review and will be analyzed in the next section

### The Bibliographic Analysis

In light of a qualitative data analysis perspective, the studies examined can be categorized and classified as follows:

**Table 2:** Data Classification

Virtual/ Real Gains
Language Proficiency > Mobility > Internationalization

**Source:** The author.

By and large, the research studies investigated have one analytical category in common (gains). In this respect, the Paraná Speaks English Program is believed to have brought gains (benefits) to the participants involved (at a real level). Furthermore, such gains can be seen at a virtual level, given that only documents were analyzed, as is the case of El Kadri and Di Raimo (2017).

The first gain belongs to a cognitive domain, as one's language proficiency could be enhanced through the program:

(...) the fact that the news show that the program will offer preparatory courses for the TOEFL IBT depicts a concerning with language proficiency (EL KADRI; DI RAIMO, 2017, p. 70).

Besides the personal and linguistic-communicative development, essential components for teaching practices, the teachers involved could have a continuing teacher education (...) (MARSON; BORGES, 2015, p. 85).

We understand that PFI, besides contributing to a good TOEFL iBT score, enabled better learning of English to the participants (MARSON, 2017, p. 85).

As explicated earlier, in El Kadri and Di Raimo (2017), such gains are virtual, whilst in Marson; Borges (2015) and Marson (2017), they are real. Moreover, in Marson and Borges (2015), there is a professional gain added to the cognitive one, as the program could also promote (continuing) teacher education. This point is worth stressing, since the gains of the program are almost always portrayed as linguistic improvement and mobility. Nonetheless, the multiplicity of actions in the program renders it a fruitful field that yields numerous gains, which encompass teacher education, digital literacy, intercultural experiences, to name a few.

As depicted in Table 2, the improvement in language proficiency is frequently attached to internationalization. In other words, language proficiency is construed as a commodity and this in turn is a requirement for internationalization:

The proposal of PFI at UEPG (...) is of paramount importance, giving that (...) there is a huge demand from undergraduates, graduates, faculty (...) and staff who need TOEFL iBT *to be admitted into foreign institutions* (MARSON; BORGES, 2015, p. 87, *emphasis added*).

(...) the objective to learn a foreign language is intrinsically related the internationalization of the public universities. The need for the English language is participating *in exchange programs abroad* and accomplishing international cooperation (...) (EL KADRI; DI RAIMO, 2017, p. 69-70, *emphasis added*).

The participants signaled the importance of internationalization, restricting it to opportunities of *academic mobility*, showing that TOEFL, depending on the marks scores, enables them to be *inserted in foreign contexts* (MARSON, 2017, p. 82, *emphasis added*).

Besides unveiling a categorical relationship between English language and internationalization, the excerpts suggest that research on the Paraná Speaks English Program has perceived ‘mobility’ as the main element of internationalization. As pointed by Petreche and Senefonte (2017), notwithstanding the complexities and numerous possibilities of the internationalization of HE, mobility seems to prevail and almost always hinges upon language proficiency (English). However, as adduced in the literature review, internationalization encompasses manifold activities besides mobility, such as other partnerships (curriculum, research, seminar, projects), benchmarking and others (KNIGHT, 2004; ALTBACH; KNIGHT, 2007). Hence, such activities could be seen as another domain the program could explore.

In this sense, it is important to emphasize that language (English) is perceived as commodity. The commodification of a language neglects its multifaceted nature. In other words, language is reduced to a ‘means of communication’ perspective. However, it is well known that language serves heterogeneous purposes in a society and ‘communication’ is only one of them.

It is of utmost importance to highlight the gains promoted by the program. Nonetheless, as stated by Marson (2017), academic mobility is only for a few students/faculty, hence, the program needs to go further in terms of the purposes of the courses offered. Inasmuch as language is understood as a very powerful tool that operates in many actions (e.g. power relations, inclusion, exclusion, one's empowerment etc.), the program could offer courses that are aligned with such view. This way, the whole academic community could be benefited and not only a few.

### Conclusive Notes

Throughout this paper, I have explained the relationship between internationalization and language policies. Then, I exemplified two prominent policies in Brazil, including the Paraná Speaks English Program. This bibliographic research provided an analysis of the only three studies on the program (MARSON, BORGES, 2015; EL KADRI, DI RAIMO, 2017; MARSON, 2017). With this in mind, I emphasize the relevance of this study, as: A) it illustrates a systematization of the body of the literature on the aforesaid program; b) it provides an up-to-date literature review on the program and c) It signals a dearth of studies in this field, which in turn is an invitation for future reflective practices, debates, projects and research.

As shown earlier, research on the Paraná Speaks English Program is mainly centered on the English language as a central component for the internationalization of higher education. Therefore, there is a noticeable commodification of the English language. Moreover, the significant scarcity of studies on such program indicate that further investigation is warranted, for two main reasons: First, the program is in its second edition and certain progress is still needed, especially with respect to the nature of the courses offered, didactical material employed, human resources issues and other questions that can be better examined for a future edition of the program. Secondly, the Paraná Speaks Languages program can be construed as a new field that emerges in the academic scenario. As a new field, it invites future researchers to explore, expand and enrich it.

As internationalization and language policies are considerably broad concepts, these fields of inquiry can give rise to numerous possibilities of investigation that go beyond the 'mobility' domain. Hence, future research on the Paraná Speaks English Program can potentially explore other spheres, such as: languages other than English, benefits other than the improvement in language proficiency (teacher education, digital literacy, for instance) and so forth.



Without a doubt, this multifaceted program is promising and has brought manifold benefits to the state universities involved. As a governmental initiative, its merits should be acknowledged. With appropriate research, investment and other initiatives/actions, it can certainly become a role model for other language policies/programs.

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